

VENABLE HOTEL (HAMILTON HOTEL)  
1024 SW Third  
Portland  
Multnomah County  
Oregon

HABS No. OR-159

HABS  
ORE  
26-PORT,  
8-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Western Region  
Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California 94107

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

HABS  
ORE  
26-PORT,  
8-

### THE VENABLE HOTEL (The Hamilton Hotel)

HABS No. OR-159

**Location**

1024 SW Third Avenue, between SW Main Street and SW Salmon Street, Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon 97209

UTM Coordinates: 10-525450-5040250

**Present Owner**

The Bingham Investment Company

**Present Use and Occupants**

The Hamilton Hotel occupies the second, third and fourth floors of the building. Retail shops on the first floor currently include The Sewing Circle; The Shoe Doctor; The Main Smoke Shop; Fran's General Store Deli; Abbot and Reinhard Company Secondhand Store; and Legal Secretarial and Process Services. Three retail storefronts on SW Third Avenue and SW Main Street are vacant.

**Significance**

The Hamilton Hotel is significant as an example of its architectural style and building type associated with low-income urban dwelling, and because of its association with its designer, noted Portland Architect, John V. Bennes. The Hotel represents development in Portland, during an era of rapid urban expansion.

**Legal Description**

Lots 5, 6 and 7, Block 24, Portland Addition in the City of Portland, County of Multnomah and State of Oregon.

Note: The Multnomah County Tax Assessor's Account number is R-66770-3720.

**Date of Construction**

1911 - 1913; original building permit drawings (Microfilm copies) are dated September 11, 1911.

**Architect**

John Virginius Bennes, Bennes and Hendricks Architects (microfilm copy of original building permit drawings dated May, 1911 by Bennes and Hendricks, 400 Henry Building, Portland)

**Contractor**

Unknown

**Exterior Features of Note**

- Beige "Huron" brick, American bond pattern with projecting corbels at primary facades
- Brick sills on the primary facades
- Brick pilasters with granite base at first floor
- Cream-colored, glazed terra cotta quoining and panels
- Painted, cast iron storefront square columns with capitals
- Decorative wall plates at marquee chain support
- Metal marquee (originally with ribbed wire glass roof)
- Painted, galvanized sheet metal trim band with "Greek Key" pattern
- Projecting sheet metal cornice with geometric and rosette patterns
- Concrete parapets
- Projecting, metal and neon vertical sign above the marquee.
- Ornamental metal fire escapes at the primary facades
- Metal framed skylights with wire glass at light court and light wells
- Wood rods and partial mechanisms for canvas, roll-down awnings
- Painted, double hung wood windows with plate glass at primary facades
- Plate and ribbed glass window glazing at above the first floor; ribbed and wire glass at light wells and at light court
- Fixed painted wood storefront windows with polished plate glass and prism glass transoms
- Painted, oak store doors

**Interior Features of Note**

- Lath and painted plaster walls
- Wood base and picture molding throughout
- Painted, molded plaster ceiling crown molding at the first floor hotel entry foyer and lobby
- Verde Antique marble base, 1" hexagonal and 1" square tile at the hotel entry foyer
- Glazed, hexagonal and 1" square ceramic tile flooring at bathrooms and janitor closets at upper floors.
- Shaped, cylindrical wood railings and newel posts at stairs
- Cast iron bathtubs and corner sinks
- Pedimented wood medicine cabinets at guest rooms or bathrooms
- Painted and stained door and window casings and frames
- Wood, single-panel type doors throughout, some with upper glazed panel and some with glazed transom.

### Historic Context

Downtown Portland was platted as a town site in 1845 by Asa Lovejoy and F.W. Pettygrove in blocks that are typically sized 200' x 200'. Block 24, the block on which the Hamilton Hotel is located, was originally owned by Daniel Lownsdale who had acquired the property by 1848. Lownsdale set aside two blocks for Portland's first public park. These blocks were subdivided as Lownsdale and Chapman Squares, located directly west and southwest of the Hamilton Hotel across SW Third Avenue.<sup>1</sup>

During the mid-to-late 19th century, Portland experienced significant and steady growth. Its population was 7,000 in 1864, 20,000 in 1879 and 30,000 by 1883, the year that the transcontinental railroad reached the city. During this period of growth, the City's boundaries expanded and a building boom occurred. In 1905 the Lewis and Clark Exposition attracted additional settlers and tourists to Portland to initiate a post-rail era of early twentieth century expansion. From 1905 to 1910, the City's population grew very rapidly from an estimated 111,000 to over 207,000, a growth rate of over 129%. Construction in general during this time was explosive as indicated by the value of building permits: \$4.2 million in 1905 to \$19.2 million in 1910.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the construction of hotels was a booming during this period of growth. The construction value of a hotel was estimated at \$3,000,000 in 1911 and \$4,250,000 in 1912, the year the Hamilton Hotel was constructed.<sup>3</sup> The Hamilton Hotel, a three story and full basement building, 100 by 150 feet, was constructed for an estimated \$75,000.<sup>4</sup>

The site of the Hamilton Hotel, block No. 24, was developed originally in eight separate lots. James W. Cook owned three lots, No. 5, 6 and 7, which comprise the Hotel site. He developed the Hamilton Hotel in 1912. Maps in the late 1890s indicate boarding houses, sheds, offices, horse shoeing, and printers were located in Block 24. Several Chinese businesses also were located on Block 24 as the area was one of early Chinese settlement and investment.<sup>5</sup>

Records in 1909 show five separate, wood-frame structures containing two dry cleaners, a painting concern, and offices were located on the three lots (No. 5, 6, and 7). These buildings, located on these lots prior to its construction, were described in a contemporary article: "Old shacks at northeast corner of Third and Main to come down and be replaced by a modern structure."<sup>6</sup>

By 1924, insurance maps show that the entire Block 24 was filled with masonry buildings. These included the Hamilton Hotel, a mortuary building at the southwest corner, the Geneva Hotel at the northeast, and the Central Garage at the north corner of the block. The Hamilton Hotel, originally named the Venable Hotel, was renamed in 1924 or 1925. (The prominent vertical hotel sign was added above the marquee apparently in early 1926 according to city Street Use Permit Records). A restaurant, known as the Hamilton Cafe and the Venus Cafe, was located in the Hamilton Hotel building during the 1930s.

Development in the Lownsdale neighborhood during the first decades of the twentieth century included the construction of the Hawthorne Bridge (which replaced the old Madison Street Bridge) as a steel structure (1911), and construction of the Multnomah County Courthouse (1911 - 1914) at 1021 SW Fourth Avenue across Lownsdale Square from the Hamilton.

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1 U.S. GSA, Final EIS Report, Pages 3.52 - 3.62.

2 MacColl, The Shaping of a City Page 10.

3 The Journal, "New Hotels", April 3, 1912, Section 4, Page 8.

4 The Portland Daily Abstract, September 13, 1911, Page 1.

5 Judith Rees, interview, March 1, 1993.

6 The Portland Daily Abstract, September 12, 1991, Page 1.

The Lownsdale neighborhood was the site of many hotels similar to the Hamilton Hotel, constructed in the early decades of the twentieth century. The Geneva Hotel, at 218 SW Salmon Street, is also a four-storey, brick masonry hotel. It was built in 1907 and opened as Hotel Glenwood in 1909. Its proprietor was Mrs. Alice Venable, the second owner (with her husband, Charles) of the Hamilton Hotel. The Geneva Hotel was listed in the 1920 City Directory as Hotel Helvetia, run by Hausermann and Ruegger, proprietors, and renamed in 1926 the Hotel Geneva with H.O. Hausermann, proprietor.<sup>7</sup> The name Geneva Hotel remains painted on the red brick exterior, north-facing and south-facing walls of this building although the hotel was renamed the Lownsdale in recent years.

The Lennox Hotel, another four story brick structure, was constructed directly across from the Hamilton Hotel on Main Street in the block south ca. 1913, and the Green and the Lotus Hotel on SW Third Avenue in the blocks to the north in 1906.<sup>8</sup>

First recorded in Polk's City Directory in 1913, the Hamilton Hotel was originally called Hotel Venable. It was located at "228 3rd ne cor Main" and run by "Mrs. A. and Chas. Venable, Proprietors". The Venables resided at the Hotel according to the Directory. The Hotel's proprietor was listed as Frank (and Elizabeth) Cook in 1920, and the resident manager, was D. S. Harvey. The Cook Estate owned the building as of 1926 and David S. (and Ethel L.) Harvey continued to manage it in 1930. In 1935 the manager is listed as Ross and Bessie Enyart. (Mrs. Bessie G. Eynart is also listed in the 1935 Directory as the Manager of the Rowland Hotel.) J.C. Cook Esq. was listed as the owner in the early 1940s. Subsequent owners of the Hotel are noted on city building permits and inspection cards: J.C. Crumpacker (in 1950), Cornelia C. Menefee (1955, 1960, 1962 and 1975), and Clark, Stuart and Selwyn Bingham, Jr. dba as The Bingham Investment Company (1980 - present).

The early twentieth century, downtown hotels accommodated Portland's downtown workers, tourists, and business travelers. Those located, as the Hamilton Hotel was, north of Burnside Street, and particularly those nearer to the center of finance, retail and theaters were often grander. The hotels along the river waterfront housed pensioners and seasonal workers. The Hamilton Hotel with its arrangement of three-room suites and its high ratio of private bathrooms to rooms, may have served a more middle class of clientele in comparison to the nearby boarding houses or the more modest Geneva, Lennox or Green Hotels.

#### Architectural Description of the Hamilton Hotel

The Hamilton Hotel is a four-storey, rectangular structure with a central light court that penetrates to the second floor level. The site and building footprint are 150' x 100' or 15,000 sq. ft. and the total building area is 53,814 sq. ft. Above the first floor there is the 18' x 72' light court with four skylights at the center of the building, a 6' x 61' recess that provides a skylit light well on the north side and a 7' x 72' recess that provides one on the east side. The building is approximately 53' tall from the street grade to the top of the roof parapet. Floor heights are first floor, 15'-6"; second and third floors, 10'-9"; fourth floor, 9'-6"; and to the top of the parapet, 7'-6". Three metal fire escapes and a metal marquee at the hotel entry project from the building.

The Hotel is constructed of unreinforced brick and wood framing which was described at the time of construction as "heavy, slow burning mill construction. . . a solid, substantial structure of attractive appearance".<sup>9</sup> Red common brick is used on the secondary facades facing a parking lot to the east and a party wall to the north. At the primary facades, on Third Avenue to the west and Main Street to the north, the facing masonry is a dense, buff-colored brick, identified as "Huron" brick.

<sup>7</sup> Portland City Directories (1912, 1913, 1920, 1925, 1930 and 1935).

<sup>8</sup> Portland Bureau of Planning, Historic Resources Inventory

<sup>9</sup> Portland Daily Abstract, September 13, 1991, Page 1.

Exterior decorative elements include cream-colored molded terra cotta quoins, panels and belt course, and a painted galvanized sheet-metal cornice and parapet. Cast "Sterling Stone" panels were called out on the original construction drawings to be located at the corners above the terra cotta belt course, but these do not appear to have been installed. Stamped, painted galvanized metal panels are provided at these locations.

The original eight stores at the ground floor are defined by brick pilasters on granite bases and square, cast iron columns with  $6 \times 6 \times 3/8$  "Railroad Iron" Relieving Arches (or flat beams) which carry the loads from above. The Hotel entry, located at the center of the building on Third Avenue, is defined by pilasters, a metal and sheet metal marquee and a vertical, full-building height sign board with neon sign. The marquee, which originally had a ribbed glass roof, is supported by chains attached with decorative lion head brackets. Ornamental metal fire escapes are located on the primary facades -- two symmetrically placed on the west facade and one on the north facade. Above the wood and glass storefronts, the double-hung, painted wood hotel windows provide a consistent rhythm of openings at the upper facades. At the light well and light court, these windows are filled with wire and ribbed glass. At the primary facades, plate glass is used at the storefronts and prism glass at the transom windows.

The Hotel retains most of its original exterior character although the original decorative parapet cresting no longer exists, and some of the storefront elements have been removed or replaced. The exterior is in relatively good condition with exception of roof leaks.

The first floor plan of the Hamilton Hotel building is, for the most part, original. Individual storefronts and the Hotel lobby each have access to separate basement spaces. Most of the store entries are recessed in from the front plane of the facade. Partial areaways and steel sidewalk doors once accessed to the basement level storage spaces. The sidewalk access doors have been closed.

The Hotel lobby and foyer retain the original tile mosaic floors, painted molded plaster cornices, wood door and window trim and moldings. Although Kasota marble was called out in the original drawings as wainscot material in the foyer, only a Antique Verde marble base remains. The original, full-height wood paneling at the Lobby has also been removed. An elaborate staircase which leads from the foyer to the second floor is original. Two other original exit stairways connect the upper floors, two through four. The south stairs contain the original turned balusters and rails; those in the North and Main stairs are turnings which have been recently fabricated to replace the deteriorated original ones. All three stair retain their original newel posts.

The upper three floors of the Hotel are consistent in their original layout of corridors, guest rooms, shower and individual bathtub, toilet rooms and private bath rooms. With the exception of the conversion of one bathtub room on each floor into a shower room, and the addition of an exit stair at the northeast corner, the use and configurations have been maintained. Shared and private bathtub rooms contain original porcelain cast iron bathtubs with ball and claw feet, and bath. Bathrooms retain original tile floors. Many toilet fixtures are original, as are sinks with original pedimented medicine cabinets. These cabinet details match the surrounds on closet and hallway doors that remain in some of the rooms.

Finishes throughout the Hotel include carpet laid over the original fir floors; painted plaster walls; painted panel-type fir doors, base and picture moldings; painted double-hung windows with wood sash. An original radiator, connected to the steam heating system, is provided in every room. An iron boiler, manufactured by the Kendall Company of Portland, has been replaced by a modern unit, but remains in place in the basement. Also in the basement are remnants of the Otis elevator which was installed during or soon after the Hotel's original construction.

The Hamilton Hotel is in good condition, with the exception of leaking roof and skylights. The original interior spatial layout and material fabric retain a very high level of integrity and are in good condition. The exterior retains most of the character-providing features of the original building and is in relatively good condition with the exception of roof leaks and rusting of the sheet metal cornice.

Currently half of the retail spaces at the ground floor are empty. The upper floors continued to operate until as a hotel with an occupancy rate ranging from 60% to 90%. The Hotel, its residents and all retail tenants are scheduled to close and leave the building as of May 1, 1993 to allow for construction of a new federal courthouse on the block.

#### Major Alterations and Additions with Dates

Originally the building was constructed with an ornamental sheet metal with continuous cresting at the top of the primary facades. However, according to photographs, this was removed by 1939. The original drawings called for a cast iron, floral patterned panel with the hotel name to be set above the hotel entry doors, but there is no evidence that this was provided.

A sheet metal vertical sign with neon lighting was added above the hotel entry ca. 1926. The ribbed glass of the marquee roof may have been removed or enclosed at this time.

A restaurant was located at the southwest corner retail space between ca. 1920 - 1950. A single retailer, Schumacher Furs, was located in the south storefronts at 249 and 251 SW Main Street from 1913 until 1965; subsequently this space was subdivided into separate storefronts. Interiors of retail spaces have been incrementally changed with lowered ceiling of acoustic tile, new flooring, removal of window display counters and some interior partitioning.

Interior stairs to the basement were added in 1947, and some skylights were removed in 1950. Minor changes made in the hotel at the upper floor corridors include the removal of hallway chair rails throughout, and installation of fire exit doors on the second floor in ca. 1976. Fire alarms and sprinklers were added in the 1984, and some minor repairs made after a fire at the northeast corner in 1986.

The Hotel lobby desk location was shifted from its original location on the south wall of the lobby, as indicated by the tile pattern on the floor as well as by the original drawings, to the north wall (date unknown). One public bathroom on each floor was modified to provide showers in lieu of clawfoot tubs (date unknown).

#### Architectural Significance

The Classic Revival Commercial Style of the Hamilton Hotel utilizes classical forms and decorative elements. Buildings in this style are typically balanced and symmetrical. Primary entries are announced. Facade composition is based on that of a classical column with a base, shaft and capital, regardless of the building's height. In the case of the Hamilton Hotel, this compositional device is referenced in the ground level storefronts as the base, the symmetrical walls of the Hotel at the upper floors as the shaft, and the projecting cornice and parapet as the capital.

The Commercial Style is characterized by the use of terra cotta as a cladding decorative material. Use of this material was inspired by the Chicago Columbia Exhibition in 1893 as well as by its fire-resistance, and the range of its color and plastic capabilities. In Pacific Coast cities, the height era of terra cotta architecture is considered have been the first two decades of the twentieth century. In Portland it was 1912 - 1914.<sup>10</sup>

On the Hamilton Hotel, terra cotta is used in a relatively standard manner with floral and geometric patterned decorative panels and quoining at the corners of the building. The cream-colored, smooth textured terra cotta contrasts with the light buff colored brick on the primary facades.

John V. Bennes, Architect of the Hamilton Hotel

The Hamilton Hotel is significant because of its architectural style, association with Portland's urban development, and the prominence of its architect, John Virginius Bennes (1867-1943). Bennes was born in Peru, Illinois and was educated at University of Chicago. He spent one year at the School of Fine Arts in Prague, Bohemia. He began his career working in his father's Chicago architectural office in ca. 1890.<sup>11</sup> Early influences in his design may have been provided by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and by the Chicago Columbia Exposition, 1891- 1893.

Bennes moved to Baker City, Oregon with his family in 1900. There he designed Baker High School, City Hall, Geiser Grand Hotel, and a number of notable residences. He moved to Portland in 1906 where he practiced architecture for 37 years. During his career, he designed both residential and commercial buildings in the city, 35 of which are listed on the Portland Historic Resources Inventory. Buildings in Oregon which have been listed on the National Register attributed to Bennes include Hot Lake Sanitarium near LaGrande (1906, Bennes), Hotel Cornelius (1907-08, Bennes), A. H. Maegly House (1914-1915, Bennes), Coleman-Scott House (1916, Bennes), Hollywood Theater (1926, Bennes and Herzog), Temple Beth Israel (1926-28, Brookman and Whitehouse in conjunction with Bennes and Herzog), and the Oregon State College Administration Building in LaGrande (1929, Bennes). Bennes was also the architect for an estimated 22 buildings on and around Oregon State University in Corvallis dating from 1905 through 1935.<sup>12</sup> Bennes was active in the Portland Chapter of the American Institute of Architects: he served as its Vice President in 1921, President in 1922, and Director, 1923-1928.

During his career, Bennes worked not only in a number of different styles, but in a number of different professional partnerships. The firm Bennes, Hendricks, and Tobey was established in 1906. In 1910, a different partnership, Bennes, Hendricks and Thompson, was formed. From 1911-1913, the firm was known as Bennes and Hendricks. No information is available about Hendricks after 1913, but Bennes continued to practice as a sole practitioner until 1926 when he formed a partnership with a former firm draftsman, Harry Herzog. This partnership was active until 1931. Bennes retired in 1941. He moved to Los Angeles in early 1943 where he died in the fall of that year.<sup>13</sup>

Bennes' career was long and productive. An estimated 70 buildings have been identified as having been designed by him individually or by one of his partner.<sup>14</sup> His work spanned a period of rapid change in American architecture. The stylistic variety and quality of his work suggests a mastery of technique and design, and an ability to adapt to the changing styles including the Prairie School, French Renaissance, Classical and Colonial Revival, Spanish Baroque, and Byzantine and Art Deco Moderne.<sup>15</sup>

The Current Context

Two National Register properties, one of Portland's seven historic districts, and the two park blocks, are located in the Lownsdale neighborhood. The Multnomah County Courthouse (1911 - 1914), located at 1021 SW Fourth Avenue, and the Auditorium Building (originally the Auditorium and Music Hall, 1894) located at 980 SW Third Avenue are listed on the National Register. Nearby structures listed on Portland's Historic Resources Inventory are Hotel Lotus (1906) at 932 SW Third Avenue, and Ancient Order of United Workmen (AOUW) Temple/Tourney Apartments (1892) at 915 SW Third Avenue.

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- 11 National Register Nomination Forms: Maegly House.
  - 12 National Register Nomination Forms: Broadway Hotel.
  - 13 National Register Nomination Forms: The Hollywood Theater.
  - 14 National Register Nomination Forms: Broadway Hotel.
  - 15 Bosker, Gideon and Lencek, Lena, Frozen Music, Pages 59-60.



The Yamhill Historic District is located two blocks north of the Hamilton Hotel. The two park blocks containing Lownsdale and Chapman Square, are opposite the Hamilton Hotel. These are bounded by SW Salmon Street, SW Third Avenue, SW Madison Street, and SW Fourth Avenue. The proximity of these properties to the Hamilton Hotel is indicated on the Location Plan.

The setting of the Hamilton Hotel has been considerably altered by changes in the city's economy, development since the late 1960s, and by urban renewal efforts in the southeast part of the downtown. Despite the close proximity of a number of designated landmarks, National Register properties and historic districts, the more recently constructed, large scale, full-block structures are typical. These buildings include 16-storey Multnomah Justice Center in the block directly west of Lownsdale Square, 26-storey Insurance Center Building, 15-storey Portland Building across Chapman Square, 17-storey World Trade Center, and 20-storey One Main Place which sit on the blocks bounded by SW First and SW Second Avenues between SW Main.<sup>16</sup>

These large, contemporary structures, increasingly make up the government center of the city. They effectively overwhelm the scale of many of the remaining three to four-storey, late nineteenth and early twentieth century hotel buildings. Along with the demolition and removal of many of the older hotels has been the loss of the small retail street-level services which once catered to the needs of lower-income hotel residents.

According to Yvonne Huschka, who has been the Hamilton Hotel's resident manager since 1963, the current hotel clientele consists of low-income pensioners, low-income workers, and transients. Approximately 40% of the hotel's residents are transients, a category for people who stay for fewer than seven days. Others use it as permanent housing, although no housekeeping or cooking facilities, other than microwave ovens, are permitted in the rooms. The Hotel is not subsidized by government agencies, but rents are relatively low, running currently from \$80 per week and to \$200- \$250 per month. Residents are typically single people. The average length of stay varies between two weeks and two months. In March of 1993, the Hotel was 90% occupied.<sup>17</sup>

Currently half of the retail spaces at the ground floor are empty. The upper floors continue to operate as a hotel. The Hotel, its residents and all retail tenants are scheduled to close and leave the building as of May 1, 1993.

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<sup>16</sup> U.S. GSA, Final EIS Report, pages 3.52 - 3.62.

<sup>17</sup> Huschka, Yvonne, interview, February 23, 1993.

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#### **Interviews:**

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Huschka, Yvonne, Current Manager of the Hamilton Hotel, interview, February 23, 1993 and March 5-6, 1993.

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A. E. Maegly House (1914-15), 226 SW Kingston St., Portland, Listed NRHP - 2/02/1981.

The Cornelius Hotel (1908), 525 SW Park Avenue, Portland, Listed NRHP - 2/27/1986.

The Multnomah County Courthouse (1911 & 1914), 1021 SW Fourth Ave., Portland, Listed NRHP - 6/11/1979.

The Hollywood Theater (1926), 4122 NE Sandy Blvd., Portland, Listed NRHP - 9/01/1983.

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"John V. Bennes, 76 Years Old," November 30, 1943, page 9.  
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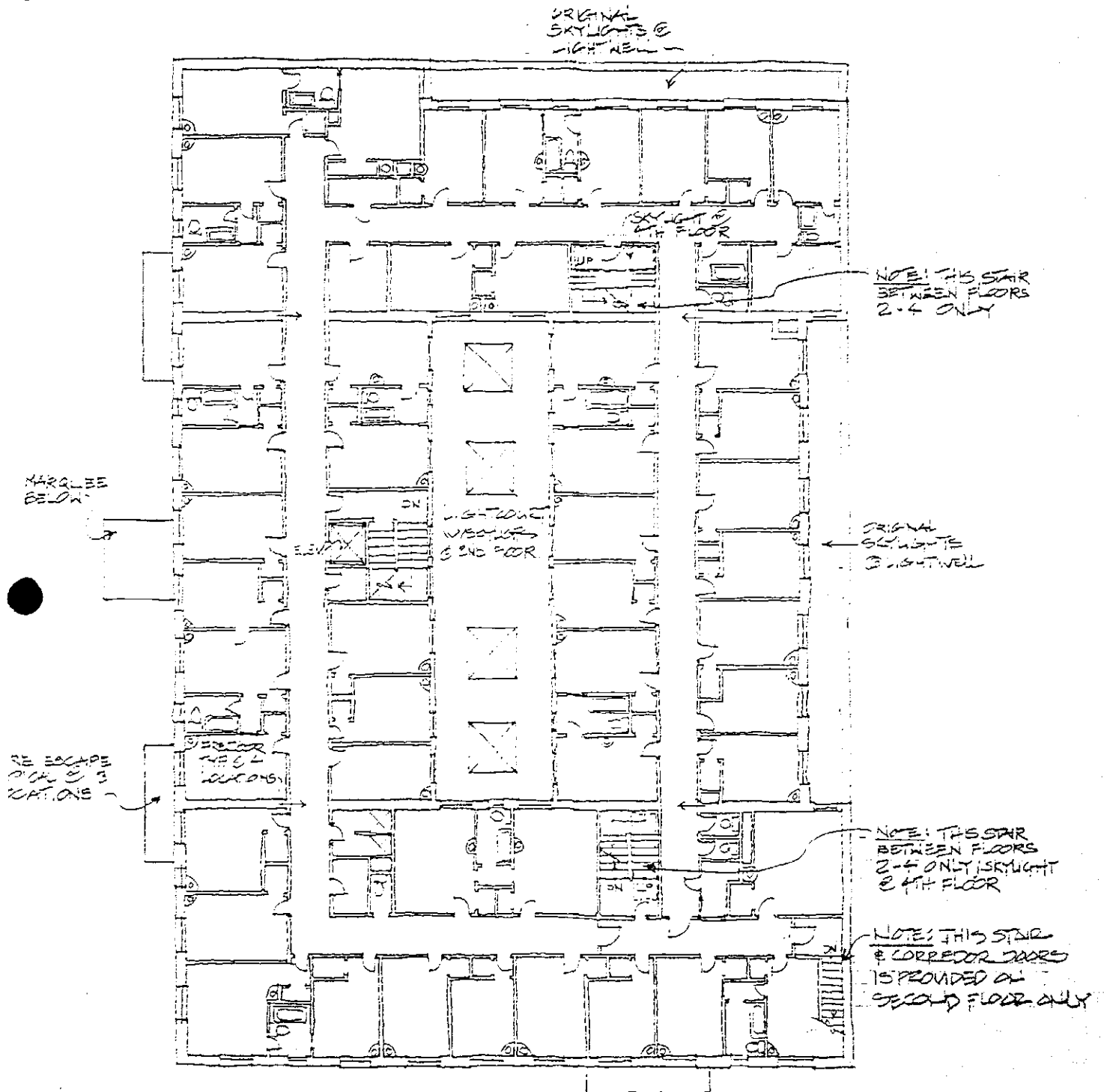
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THE VENABLE HOTEL (THE HAMILTON HOTEL)

HABS No. OR-159

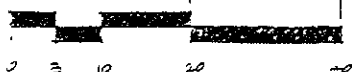
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NORTH



SECOND FLOOR PLAN (THIRD & FOURTH FLOOR SIMILAR)



Photocopy: The Portland Development Commission, 1993 (prepared for the Broadway Hotel National Register Nomination), Location Map showing historic hotels in Downtown Portland.

